

## **Appendix E: Public Involvement**

Through newsletters, public service announcements, and public workshops, the public was invited to participate in the study process. Seven informational open houses were held in the seven Loess Hills counties during the week of February 28, 2000. The purpose of these meetings was to inform citizens about the Special Resources Study and to respond to questions and concerns. A newsletter was distributed following these meetings. A second newsletter was issued in the fall which summarized various management strategies for preserving the Loess Hills, announced public workshop dates for refining these management options, and included a comment card for those unable to participate in the workshops. Finally, five workshops were held in local communities, and in Des Moines, Iowa, to capture input from residents living within and outside of the Loess Hills. Over four hundred individuals attended these last workshops, which were held between November 13-16, 2000.

Approximately 800 written comments were received. Of those, about seven hundred letters reflected the official position of National Parks Conservation Association, a private, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing America's National Park System. Additionally, the study team received letters from the Iowa Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Golden Hills Rural Conservation District, and the Loess Hills Landowners and Operators Association. These letters are included in this appendix.

### **Summary of Written and Verbal Comments**

There is general consensus that "something should be done" in the Loess Hills to protect the natural, scenic, and cultural heritage of the area. Residential developments, quarrying operations, and erosion were the most often cited threats to the resource. However, opinions on how future protection should be accomplished varied.

Many individuals did not want the federal government involved, resented outsiders telling them what to do with their land, and asked the National Park Service to "go home." Many of these individuals expressed the fear that they would relinquish their private property rights, and noted that they were already good stewards of the land. Conversely, many others felt that options #1 and #2, which left management at a local or regional level, were too weak (lacked regulatory control), did not have enough federal involvement, and were not viable because the local government units could not be trusted to implement conservation programs. These individuals supported federal designation and felt that the designation would lead to additional funding for protection.

There was a common concern that the local government units would not be able to, as one individual phrased it, "handle zoning and planning," citing lack of staff, technical expertise, and funding as stumbling blocks. Most of the residents supported an alternative that would help willing private property owners implement preservation options through technical assistance and educational forums, creation of conservation easements, or targeted Loess Hills-friendly tax incentives. It was often suggested that partnership opportunities with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Loess Hills Alliance, and other state, local and federal agencies should be enhanced.

### **Summary of Central Survey's Opinion Survey (2000)**

During November and December, 2000, a telephone opinion survey of the general public, landowners, and Loess Hills Board Members was conducted (Central Surveys, Inc. 2000). The purpose of the survey was to explore land management issues within the Loess Hills Region. The

report is based on a total of 700 cross section interviews and 578 interviews with landowners (owning one acre or more) in the Loess Hills.

Results of the telephone survey are summarized below.

This survey found strong consensus among both landowners and the general public on a number of questions or issues addressed in the survey. The majority felt that "not enough, rather than too much, is being done to protect/preserve the Loess Hills," and that "not enough, rather than too much is being done to protect the rights of private landowners." There was strong opposition to increased residential development in the region, and strong agreement that local zoning laws are needed. There was also strong agreement that state and regional coordination is needed to ensure consistency of laws and regulations affecting the Loess Hills and that increased incentives are needed to encourage conservation practices.

The majority of respondents felt that acquisition of land from willing sellers by the state, or by the Loess Hills Alliance in partnership with private conservation groups, for the purpose of preserving the landform, was an acceptable approach. Likewise, over 50 percent of those interviewed did not agree that federal acquisition of land from willing sellers in the Loess Hills is the best way to protect the Loess Hills. However, a similar question, inquiring about the federal acquisition of land for the purpose of establishing a National Park, yielded some interesting contradictory results: while in four of the seven counties over 50 percent of Loess Hills landowners disagreed with this proposal, a cross section of interviewees agreed with federal land purchase for a National Park in all seven counties (with over 50 percent agreement in five of the seven counties). Likewise, there were strong differences within the landform, with Mills, Pottawattamie, and Woodbury Counties showing the strongest support for NPS land acquisition, and Monona County opposing such purchase most strongly (based on the cross section sample). Considering only the landowners, majorities in four of the seven counties disagreed with the statement "...the National Park Service should acquire land in the Loess Hills to be designated as a National Park and managed by the federal government". Landowners in the four northern counties were strongly opposed to the idea of a National Park in the Loess Hills region.

There was general agreement that zoning laws are needed to regulate mining and other land use activities, that state and regional coordination of zoning and conservation efforts is needed to ensure consistency, and that increased incentives to landowners should be encouraged.

Interestingly, while over 50 percent of those interviewed in the cross section felt that governmental involvement is needed to protect and preserve the Loess Hills, 50 percent also felt that protection of the landform can best be achieved through partnerships of private landowners and private conservation groups. There was strong agreement that the National Park Service should work with local and regional planners on tourism and economic development, and should provide technical and educational assistance on conservation.





















